



Narratives: of the Future of Education When It Comes to an End

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Abstract

This paper aims to reflect if educational theory, at least some of its current representatives, should rely on a "master" narrative to be legitimated or guided in a postmodern age marked precisely, according to Jean-François Lyotard, by the disbelief in metanarratives [1]. Such a condition is all but new and it can be said that we live today the unfolding of most of Lyotard's (accurate) predictions. Nevertheless, this perspective still provides us a powerful set of critical issues to evaluate the relevance of the educational discourse like the one held by Neil Postman on our present (and future) in "The End of Education" [2]. His main argument about the "end" of education - in the double sense of goal and of a limit (a third sense is embedded: without a goal, education dies) - is the need for American educators to inculcate back in the students the lacking spirit and greatness that can be drawn from the "American Credo". This proposition could be extended to all claims for national or great narratives able to unite, inspire and guide the educational actors, syllabuses and policies. Postman's thesis comes as a reinforcement as well as a confessed conservative revision of his earlier work, "Teaching as a subversive activity" [3]. Most "subversive" imperatives from 1967 remain up to date: questioning prior to readymade answers in the classroom, adaption to change as a surviving strategy, the teacher's role as a "crap detector", among others. The exception is the role and treatment given to narrative: the gods society believes in, craves for, are narrative(s). The only alternative is choosing our gods among such narratives. The classroom becomes then a place to resist the outside gods and to recite the story of the inspiring ones: the Great American "Experiment" (and its heroes: Lincoln, Jefferson, etc.), the creation of a Common Public, the Great Liberal Democracy, School as a Civilizing space. Let's say, a Collectively Shared Narrative. The unwanted gods are: Consumerism, Technology, Multiculturalism, Insignificance (deconstructive philosophies), Disorder (narratives always point out an order). Postman does not make clear when the teacher's and the student's questioning should stop when the issue is... "great narratives". Or "metanarratives". It is through it, though, that modern times created "its great heroes, great dangers, great periplus and, mainly, the great sociopolitical and economic objectives, bringing an impossible but desired greatness to a world rather given as bourgeois and capitalist, low and decaying" [4]. Moreover, Silviano Santiago reminds us that the postmodern condition is reformist in the eyes of the revolutionaries, irrational and anarchical to the illuminists, only modernizing to the moderns, "but in its own eyes, postmodernity is antitotalitarian, i.e. democratically fragmented, and it is useful to sharpen our intelligence about what is heterogeneous, marginal, sidelined, daily, so that historical reason brings up new objects of study" [5]. By refusing the "small narratives", Postman refuses the postmodern condition and gives Education a conservative solution, avoiding, thus, one of the main challenges in Education: facing the open consequences of its narrativity.

References

- [1] LYOTARD, Jean-François. *A condição pós-moderna*. 14. ed. Trad. Ricardo Corrêa Barbosa. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 2011. p. xvi.
- [2] POSTMAN, Neil. *O fim da educação: redefinindo o valor da escola* [The end of education]. Rio de Janeiro: Graphia, 2002.
- [3] POSTMAN, Neil; WEINGARTNER, Charles. *Contestação. Nova fórmula de ensino* [Teaching as a subversive activity]. Rio de Janeiro: Expressão e Cultura, 1978.
- [4] SANTIAGO, Silviano. A explosiva exteriorização do saber. Posfácio. In: LYOTARD, Jean-François. *A condição pós-moderna*. 14. ed. Trad. Ricardo Corrêa Barbosa. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 2011. p. 127.
- [5] Idem. Ibidem.